DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 432 HE 010 254

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TITLE University Accountability.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accreditation (Institutions); *Educational Accountability; Federal Legislation; *Government Role; *Government School Relationship; *Higher Education; *Institutional Autonomy; State Legislation; Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

Why accountability by institutions of higher education is necessary is discussed. Current federal, regional, and state involvement in accountability is examined. Such involvement includes federal legislation, regional accrediting agencies' requirements, and state legislation. Future trends in accountability requirements are also examined. (SPG)

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ED157432

University Accountability

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What Is Accountability?

Historically, one unquestioned aspect of higher education has been the acceptance of institutional autonomy. Resources, from both public and private sources, were given to educational institutions with little concern about the results. Education was for the sake of education and for a small portion of the population. Now, however, different expectations of educational systems exist.

Although many privately endowed institutions of higher education may continue to support and pursue the concept of an inherently liberal education, modern proponents of a concept of a pragmatic liberal education recognize a new set of expectations, particularly for public institutions of postsecondary education. Circumstances in public and private life have never been so complex, and education is going to have to be treated as a means rather than an end.[1]

Changing societal values have led to wide acceptance of education as a right rather than a privilege creating a bulk of new concerns.[2] Federal input into Veterans Benefit Programs, Basic Education Opportunity Grants, and other Federal and State financial aid programs have served to change the climate of public institutions of postsecondary education.

Increasing recognition of the potential of postsecondary education as an agent of socialization has caused funding sources and lay governing boards to ask pointed questions about the cost-effectiveness of education systems. Annual drop-out rates of over one million students annually can be translated into fifty percent attrition rate at the community college level. Seventy-five percent of those drop-outs are considered low-achieving.[3]

With the public concern about the effectiveness of educational systems and a perception that increasing resources are being consumed by those same educational systems, governing boards and funding sources have asked hard questions and expect straight answers. Just as the 60's were considered the golden age for education, the 70's might be called the age of accountability.

As with any trend or concept, perceptions, definitions, and understandings have a wide degree of diversity. A speech by Jim Allen in March of 1970 illustrated the stage being set for the current expectations of the educational system.

> "People have a right to be assured that ... increasingly large investments in public education ... will produce results."[4]

A rather vague statement, the door appears open for all sorts of assumptions and expectations.

Leon Lessinger is often credited (or scourged, depending on one's orientation) for initiating a great degree of the current emphasis on accountability. Lessinger purports that education reform through accountability must be heavily influenced by a concern for humanism. His definition of accountability:

> "... responsible for something to someone with predictable consequences for the desirable and understandable performance of the responsibility."[5]

Lessinger appears to be saying that satisfactory performance should be expected from those that accept the responsibility to operate an educational system, but recognition of the element of motivation and other humanistic values need to influence any method of measurement.

Accountability views held by T. H. Bell, former U. S. Deputy Commissioner of Education, are positive when embracing the potential of the concept of accountability. In a speech delivered in 1974, Bell stated:

> "Accountability should be a two-way process that serves students and solves problems ... not just a way to place blame."[6]

The key to Bell's concept of accountability is that there is input from those inside the system as well as external forces. Negotiated outcomes, obviously stand a much stronger chance of being realistic.

Bell further stated:

> "Accountability should be a negotiated agreement between participants that specifies rewards and costs that will accrue as a result of an evaluation of the statement of specified goals."[7]

Accountability considerations may be cause for the loosening of rigid requirements in favor of competencies. Increased interest in results as opposed to methods will of necessity require shifting of limited resources to produce predetermined goals. As in any good management system, synergism or constant readjustment to needs will be truely responsive to community expectations and student needs.

There is a serious question that educators are being actively involved in the negotiated agreement part of Bell's definition. Active and aggressive participation with the public sector as well as rule making groups and funding sources will be imperative to preserve any semblance to traditional thoughts of autonomy while satisfying those on the outside that resources are being expended wisely.

Kenneth Mortimer points out in Accountability in Higher Education that what external influences expected higher education to assume voluntarily during the 60's has evolved to a great extent into accountability with implications of legal liability.[8]

Financial dependence on federal and state sources of monies have created a situation of control from which there is little chance of extrication.

Social systems can and do enforce standards of accountability and those same external forces currently view higher education as a right, not a privilege - thus in an attempt to make educational opportunity equal to all, society has come to use postsecondary education as a vehicle for socialization of the young as well as a means of transmission of cultural heritage.[9]

Having looked at expectations of what an educational system ought to be, a look at current federal, regional, and state influences and trends is in order.

Federal and Regional Involvement in Accountability

Federal involvement in postsecondary education was nonexistant until the Morrill Act that was used to fill a void in perceived educational needs at that time. Since then, federal funding has constantly increased. Along with the funds, however, have come increased burdens on postsecondary education. According to Ralph Tyler, there are several reasons that influence external forces to bring pressure to bear on educational systems.[10]

1. Increasing portions of individual incomes are being spent on taxes that support public education.

2. Recognition that many products of the education system don't meet minimum standards of employment.

3. Increased efficiency in production, changing technologies, and retraining requirements.

In an analysis of trends in USOE, Albert V. Mayrhofer, a staff member, reports the first application of the concept of accountability by USOE to have been undertaken by the Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education. The application was made within the Drop-Out Prevention and Bilingual Education Programs, Titles VII and VIII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.[11]

As a result of increased tax contributions, demands for accountability to funding sources are increasing from the public sector. Increasing federal involvement in higher education is reflected in the nearly 400 federal programs now directly affecting higher education standards. In 1972 the U. S. Office of Education published 32 documents in the Federal Register. By 1976 that figure had increased to 270 documents in the same publication.[12]

Costs of implementing federally mandated programs have also increased. Equal employment, civil rights, affirmative action, elimination of discrimination, occupational health and safety, minimum wage, fair labor standards, and a myriad of other regulations serve as a continuation of external influences and control of university resources.[13]

Accountability expectations of USOE have been sporadic in nature and limited essentially to financial and statistical reporting requirements. In an attempt to lead by exhibiting exemplary activities, USOE developed in fiscal year 1971 a management by objectives system in which new state plans were required to be submitted for better management of Title III (NDEA amended) funds.[14]

Although established primarily as a data and information clearinghouse, pressure has come to bear on USOE for the responsibility of enforcing consumer protection, equal access, and similar regulations. The management by objectives system implemented in 1971 and outside pressure unofficially endorese USOE's control of purse strings as incentives for influencing institutional operation.

The Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 was a direct result of abuses of benefits extended by the G.I. Bill of 1944. Since USOE had no recognized powers official or unofficial to influence educational institutions to change or reevaluate their activities, voluntary accrediting associations were providing a reliable and inexpensive method to assure institutional quality.

Twenty-five years later, still having little or no enforcement powers, USOE has attempted to pass on regulatory responsibilities to accrediting associations. Accrediting associations do not perceive themselves as regulatory or policing bodies, yet they have become perceived as de facto responsible agencies for those purposes.[15]

USOE is not alone in attempts to have accrediting associations shoulder the responsibility to police and regulate institutions. As late as October, 1976, a regional supervisory officer of the U. S. General Accounting Office was at odds with accrediting agencies because of differing opinions as to the policies and procedures used by accrediting agencies. Federal legislation established the reliability of USOE on the judgement of accrediting institutions. Now federal influence would have accrediting agencies assume responsibility of federal interests.[16]

Accrediting agencies have their current visibility because of common concensus that a periodic evaluation by peers is healthy. If accrediting agencies were to lean towards federal influences, there is no doubt that those agencies would become suspect in the eyes of educational institutions.

Higher education in the United States is not alone in its present state of accountability concerns. A. E. Fieldhouse, in New Zealand, reports a responsibility of universities to use freedom and autonomy in a responsible manner as they were indispensible to a democratic society.[17]

The Role of States In Accountability

There is little doubt that complete and total federal regulation of public universities would be feasible or desirable. It should, however, be the posture of administrators and faculty to accept the fact that accountability exists.

Faculty and administrators alike should become actively involved as a partner in the determination of federal accountability expectations. The Carnegie Commission Report of 1971 encouraged that the primary responsibility for higher education should be delegated to state coordinating boards, and those state boards serve best when they concentrate on planning functions and consultations rather than bureaucratic control, administrative tasks, and detailed regulations.[18]

Rather than taking soft approach to accountability, state coordinating boards need to assume the posture that

"This is only a beginning, not an end."[19]

States must continue to progress toward adoption of acceptable accountability standards by their member institutions. Since it seems unlikely that any considerable gains can be made to reverse current socialization trends and accounting requirements, states can best administer accountability programs on the state level by acting in an advisory capacity while attempting to preserve the autonomy and academic freedom of those same state institutions as appears to be the intent of the law.

In the 70's total dollars of many states going to higher education topped out as social needs received increasing emphasis. Coordination needs have grown accordingly. The Educational Amendments of 1972 presented a new facet in higher education planning via the "1202 Commissions" as a means to channel federal assistance money.[20]

State legislatures also tend to support the trend to increased accountability standards through procedural controls such as program planning, budgeting, and cost formulas.[21]

State Accountability requirements as legislated in Chapter 229.57, of the Florida Code, cited as the Educational Accountability Act of 1971, charged the

commissioner of education with the responsibility of developing, implementing, maintaining, and reporting to the legislature a comprehensive program in the lower grades.[22]

Institutions of higher education have responsibility for reporting financial and related data to the Board of Regents as well as responsibility for planning and development.[23]

Attempts at long-range planning began in Florida as early as 1927 via the initiation of an Educational Survey Commission - none of its recommendations were ever adopted. Now the Board of Regents (formerly the Florida Board of Control) sits as the controlling division of the State University System. The State Board of Education is the chief policy making and coordinating body of public education in Florida.[24]

Although the Florida Board of Regents has full power, responsibility, and authority to supervise, coordinate, manage, and control the Florida University System, autonomy ends with legislative dependence for funding. It would behoove the governance board then to carefully balance accountability to the public as well as elected officials responsible for funding.

An approach used by the state of Montana in an attempt to fulfill accountability requirements uses two approaches. The first is full disclosure of financial expenditures within the postsecondary education system. Secondly, full cooperation in post audits is used as substantive proof of the effective use of resources. The intent of the Montana Commission on Post Secondary Education is visible integrity in recognition that long run autonomy rests on trust.[25]

The Future

Accountability requirements of the future are understandibly vague, but a logical assumption is that outside forces will continue to look more

discriminately at expenditures of postsecondary education systems.

In anticipation of continued requirements for information in a uniform manner, the USOE has developed a manual, Financial Accounting: Classification and Standard Terminology for State and Local School Systems. This helps to set the stage for a comprehensive system of educational information. One implication of a centralized information system is that the definition of accountability soon becomes changed from one of mutual responsibility for determining educational goals to the definition included in the publication.

> "...evidence of filling a measurable responsibility assigned under certain conditions and constraints."[26]

Suddenly the idea of shared input of educators seem to be slipping away. This definition of accountability speaks to "assigned" responsibility and no longer speaks to the need for shared input in the development of accountability systems.

In addition to the interest of maintaining shared input, the American Council on Education (ACE) recently conducted a study that showed that 1 to 4 percent of the operating budgets of institutions studied were required to meet federally mandated social programs.[27]

Education is experiencing growing pains as it moves from a traditional approach to a "community renewal" approach.

Accountability cannot and should not be expected to be measured only in terms of a relationship between dollars and learning. Educators are going to have to adopt more refined information systems not only about inputs and outputs, but operation of the education systems that recognize the different needs and requirements of individual learners.

Educators will have to assume responsibility for effective management in their institution in order to maintain the trust and confidence of the public and funding sources. By coupling effective management with documented results,

educators should be able to retain a high degree of autonomy while providing information that will reinforce the confidence that the public and funding sources have in the education system.

Footnotes

[1]Brubacher, John S., The University...It's Identity Crisis, Central Conneticut State College, New Britain, Conneticut, 1972, p. 32.

[2]Ibid, p. 31.

[3]Rouche, John E., Boher, George A. III, and Brownell, Richard L., Accountability and the Community College: Directions for the 70's, American Association of Junior Colleges, Washington, DC, 1971, pp. 3, 10.

[4]Ibid, p. 3.

[5]Lessinger, Leon and Associates, Accountability: Systems Planning in Education, ETC Publications, Homewood, Illinois, 1973, p. 3.

[6]Bell, T. H., "A Foundation to Build On," Speech given at the annual meeting of the Association of School Business Officials, 16 October 1974, p. C-2, ED 100 052.

[7]Ibid, p. C-2.

[8]Mortimer, Kenneth P., Accountability in Higher Education, American Association for Higher Education, Washington, 1972, p. 7.

[9]Ibid, p. 12.

[10]Lessinger, Leon and Tyler, Ralph, Accountability in Education, Charles A. Jones Publishing Co., Worthington, Ohio, 1971, p. 1.

[11]Hastrop, Richard P., Accountability for Educational Results, The Shoe-string Press, Inc., Hamden, Conneticut, 1973, p. 32.

[12]Bender, Louis W., Federal Regulation and Higher Education, Eric/Higher Education Research Report No. 1, 1977, American Association for Higher Education, Washington, DC, 1977, p. 16.

[13]Scheps, Clarence, Meeting the Demand for Accountability, NACUBO Professional File V8N2, National Association of College and University Business Officers, Washington, DC, March 1976, pp. 3-6.

[14]Strengthening Instruction in Academic Subjects, Title III, National Defense Educator Act as Amended, Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1971, Office of Education, Washington, 1974.

[15]Bender, p. 50.

[16]Ibid, p. 51.

[17]Fieldhouse, A. E., Accountability or Autonomy in the Universities, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, 1971, ED 112 779.

[18]Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, The Capital and the Campus, McGraw Hill Book Company, April, 1971, New York, p. 3.

[19]Pennsylvania State Consortium, Performance Based Management System: A Method for Accomplishment, Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education, DHEW/OE, Washington, 1976, p. 94.

[20]McTannaghan, Roy E., "A Coordinating Board View," Improving Statewide Planning, Josey-Bass Inc., 1974, San Francisco, pp. 28, 29.

[21]Mortimer, p. 16.

[22]Florida Statutes, 1975 edition, Ch. 229.57, Educational Responsibility.

[23]Uniform Statewide Procedures and Reporting Supplement 51, Chapter 6C-3, Rules of Department of Education, The Board of Regents, pp. 9, 10.

[24]Florida Post - High School Education: A Comprehensive Plan for the 70's, A Report to the Legislature by the Select Council on Post High School Education, Tallahassee, March, 1970, p. 3.

[25]ED 095 753, Issues in Governance, Planning, and Coordination Staff Report No. 8, Montana Commission on Post-Secondary Education, Helena, Montana, May, 1974, pp. 7-9.

[26]Roberts, Charles T. and Lichtenberger, Allan R., Financial Accounting: Classification and Standard Terminology for Local and State School Systems, DHEW Publication #(OE) 73-11800, Washington, D.C., 1973, pp. 2, 69.

[27]Bender, p. 5.

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